

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2697

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN JOSE 0496

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, CS

SUBJECT: CURRENT LATIN AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF THE U.S.

REF: STATE 10605

1. RESPONSES IN SUB-PARAGRAPHS A-J BELOW KEYED TO SPECIFIC
QUESTIONS IN REFTEL, PARAGRAPH 2.

A. LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. VULNERABILITIES BASED ON
OUTCOME OF VIETNAM WAR, WATERGATE, REVELATIONS OF U.S.
INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING U.S. ROLE IN CHILE:
THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT COSTA RICANS--BOTH LEADERS AND
THINKING POPULACE--BELIEVE THAT U.S. POWER AND PRESTIGE
HAVE ERODED OVER RECENT YEARS. THE VIETNAM WAR OUTCOME IS
VIEWED GENERALLY IN ABSOLUTIST TERMS AS A DEFEAT FOR THE
U.S. AND A VICTORY FOR OUR "ENEMIES". PUBLIC REVELATION

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OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES THROUGH CONGRESSIONAL

INVESTIGATIONS IS MORE AMAZING (TO MANY IT IS UNBELIEVABLE, TO FRIENDS OF THE U.S. IT IS DISQUIETING) THAN IS CONFIRMATION THAT THEY OCCURRED. IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED HERE THAT THE U.S. IS (AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN) GREATLY INVOLVED IN SUCH ACTIVITIES; ACCORDINGLY, THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE REPORTS IS NO SURPRISE. WATERGATE ON BALANCE IS VIEWED AS A PROOF OF STRENGTH OF THE U.S. DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, BUT THERE IS WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT THE U.S. WEARS A HAIR SHIRT ON THE MATTER. IN SUM, THE U.S. AS A SOCIETY IS STILL VIEWED AS STRONG--BUT LESS SO THAN IN THE PAST. U.S. PRESTIGE--REPUTATION FOR POWER--HAS BEEN AFFECTED ACCORDINGLY HERE; HOWEVER, BECAUSE COSTA RICANS HAVE NOT FELT ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY TOWARD COSTA RICA IN RECENT YEARS THAT IS REFLECTIVE OF U.S. FOREIGN OR DOMESTIC PROBLEMS, COSTA RICANS ARE NOT OVERLY PRONE TO DWELL ON THIS QUESTION.

B. EFFECT OF VIETNAM WAR ON COSTA RICANS' VIEW RE U.S. ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO LIVE UP TO COMMITMENTS: THE EFFECT OF THE VIETNAM WAR HAS RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS OF THE U.S. TO LIVE UP TO ITS COMMITMENTS AROUND THE WORLD. ALTHOUGH MOST CITIZENS HERE HAVE NOT PERCEIVED ANY EXTERNAL THREAT TO THEIR SECURITY AND, CONSEQUENTLY, HAVE LITTLE PERSONAL CONCERN ABOUT U.S. COMMITMENTS, THERE IS CONCERN BY THE GOCR AND THOSE WHO TAKE AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS--ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE LIKELIHOOD OF A THREAT (INSURGENCY, A CUBAN ADVENTURE) THAT WOULD CALL FOR A MILITARY RESPONSE. IN VIEW OF THE PAST U.S. RECORD IN THE AREA, COSTA RICA FEELS THAT THE U.S. CAN PROBABLY BE COUNTED ON IF A SECURITY THREAT SHOULD MATERIALIZE. BECAUSE OF VIETNAM AND MORE RECENTLY ANGOLA, HOWEVER, THEY ARE BEGINNING TO HAVE DOUBTS.

C. U.S. LEGISLATIVE/EXECUTIVE DIFFERENCES AS VIEWED IN COSTA RICA IN TERMS OF FOLLOW-THROUGH ON COMMITMENTS: COSTA RICA VIEWS ADMINISTRATION/ CONGRESSIONAL DIFFERENCES WHICH AFFECT U.S. ABILITY TO FOLLOW-THROUGH ON COMMITMENTS AS AT USAJ

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UNFORTUNATE AND AT WORST DANGEROUS OR HARMFUL. TRADE AND AID MATTERS ARE OF MORE GENERAL INTEREST THAN SECURITY ISSUES, WHERE THE CONCERN IS INCREASINGLY EXPRESSED AMONG THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPINION-MAKERS. CITING THE LACK OF U.S. RESOLVE TO THWART THE CUBANS AND THE SOVIETS IN ANGOLA, PRESIDENT ODUBER RECENTLY ASKED ME POINTEDLY IF THE

U.S. COULD BE COUNTED ON TO ASSIST COSTA RICA IF THE CUBANS WERE TO DO THE SAME THING HERE. IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT HE DID NOT THINK THAT THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM COULD OR WOULD DO MUCH TO HELP COSTA RICA IN SUCH A SITUATION WITHOUT A STRONG AND ACTIVE U.S. ROLE. U.S. CONGRESSIONAL/EXECUTIVE DIFFERENCES, HOWEVER, HAVE NOT AFFECTED COSTA RICA'S READINESS TO COOPERATE WITH AND DEPEND ON THE U.S.

ALONG THE LINE OF ODUBER, FOREIGN MINISTER FACIO RECENTLY TOLD CONGRESSMEN GILMAN AND WOLFF THAT CONGRESS' DECISION TO DENY THE PRESIDENT FUNDS FOR ANGOLA PLAYED INTO SOVIET HANDS, AS THE RUSSIANS THEN KNEW THAT THE U.S. WOULD INDEED BE UNABLE TO RESPOND. FACIO ALSO UNDERLINED THAT WHEN THE CONGRESS IS INVOLVED IN THE DETAILS OF FOREIGN POLICY-- WHICH SEEMS TO BE THE TREND IN THE U.S.--OTHER COUNTRIES SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT OF THE U.S.

D. COSTA RICA'S UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. POLITICAL PROCESS AND ESTIMATE OF ADMINISTRATION RESOLVE IN GETTING LATIN AMERICAN MEASURES THROUGH CONGRESS: BECAUSE COSTA RICA IS A THRIVING DEMOCRACY WITH A POLITICAL SYSTEM NOT UNLIKE THAT OF THE U.S., THE U.S. POLITICAL PROCESS IS FAIRLY WELL UNDERSTOOD. AMONG GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, BUSINESSMEN, AND OPINION-MOLDERS, THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM IS SOPHISTICATED. BECAUSE THE COSTA RICAN ASSEMBLY IS BEGINNING TO BECOME MORE ASSERTIVE VIZ-A-VIZ THE EXECUTIVE (BUT NOT SO MUCH IN FOREIGN POLICY), THE ROLE OF THE U.S. CONGRESS IS ALSO APPRECIATED, BUT ITS VIEWS NOT ALWAYS SHARED. ALTHOUGH THE ROLE OF THE CONGRESS IN SIGNIFICANTLY SHAPING U.S. MEASURES THAT
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AFFECT TAKEN AMERICA IS GENERALLY KNOWN HERE, THE FEELING EXISTS THAT THE EXECUTIVE COULD BE MORE FORCEFUL IN ATTEMPTS TO GET FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES TOWARD LATIN AMERICA THROUGH THE CONGRESS, AND MORE CREATIVE AND RESPONSIVE TO LATIN AMERICA IN WHAT LEGISLATION IS SENT.

E. CHANGES IN TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES TO THE U.S.: TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S. WILL NOT BE SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED IN THE LONG TERM DUE TO RECENT

U.S. DIFFICULTIES. HOWEVER, IN CONTRAST TO PAST YEARS IN COSTA RICA, THE SIZEABLE AND GROWING ANTI-U.S. FEELING IN BOTH UNIVERSITIES AND IN THE

COSTA RICAN LABOR MOVEMENT (A MANIFESTATION OF RECENT EXTREME LEFTIST INROADS) MAKES THE GOVERNMENT THINK TWICE ABOUT LOCAL POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF PRO-U.S. POSITIONS. EXISTING COSTA RICAN TIES OF THE U.S., COSTA RICA'S SIZE, ITS GEOGRAPHIC POSITION, ITS VULNERABILITY (NO ARMED FORCES), AND THE POLITICS OF THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT OR ANY CONCEIVABLE SUCCESSOR, ALL ARGUE HOWEVER AGAINST A MAJOR CHANGE FROM TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES. COSTA RICA WILL CONTINUE TO VALUE ITS CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. THE ONLY COUNTRY THAT MAY CHALLENGE U.S. INFLUENCE IN COSTA RICA OVER THE NEAR TERM--BUT ONLY PARTIALLY--IS VENEZUELA.

F. CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA AND COSTA RICAN ATTITUDES AS INDICATED IN CMN PRESIDENT ODUBER IS CONCERNED THAT THE U.S. PASSIVE ROLE IN ANGOLA COULD BE INDICATIVE OF U.S. LACK OF WILLINGNESS TO HELP A COUNTRY LIKE COSTA RICA TO THWART A CUBAN ATTACK IN THIS HEMISPHERE. THE PRESIDENT'S ATTITUDE SUMS UP THE GENERAL ONE HERE AMONG THINKING PEOPLE IN THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AND THE MEDIA--THEY ARE DISTURBED ABOUT SUCH A PROSPECT AND WONDER IF THE U.S. WOULD COME TO COSTA RICA'S ASSISTANCE IN TIME OF SUCH A

NEED. THERE IS INCREASING AWARENESS HERE THAT CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA SHOWS CUBAN ABILITY TO MOVE INTO
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SITUATIONS NEAR HOME: PANAMA, BELIZE, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, PUERTO RICO.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2698

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FOREIGN MINISTER FACIO HAS RECENTLY EXPRESSED COSTA RICA'S
OPPOSITION TO CUBAN INTERVENTION POLICY PUBLICLY; HE
PRIVATELY EXPRESSES CONDEMNATION. AT THE SAME
TIME, IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT SUCH A PRESENT
THREAT IS NOT PERCEIVED BY MOST COSTA RICANS TO BE
LIKELY. ALSO, THE COSTA RICAN PUBLIC STILL BELIEVES
THAT THE U.S. WOULD RESPOND FORCEFULLY IN SUCH AN
EVENT; REASON AND HISTORY TELL THEM THAT THE U.S.
CAN BE COUNTED ON TO HELP IN THIS AREA. NEVERTHELESS,
THEY ARE BEGINNING TO HAVE DOUBTS.

G. COSTA RICAN VIEWS ON DEALING COLLECTIVELY WITH
THE U.S. (OAS, SELA) RATHER THAN BILATERALLY: DEALING COLLECTIVELY
OR BILATERALLY WITH THE U.S. IS NOT AN EITHER OR PROPOSITION
FOR C.R.V IT DOES BOTH.

U.S. (DEFENSE THROUGH THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM; A
CONTINUED U.S. ROLE IN COSTA RICAN DEVELOPMENTAL
EFFORTS; COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES) ARE BETTER SERVED
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THROUGH CERTAIN REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS WITH U.S.
PARTICIPATION (OAS), THAN THROUGH OTHERS (SELA),
THROUGH WHICH CONFRONTATION WITH THE U.S. COULD RESULT.
ACCORDINGLY, COSTA RICAN CONSIDERS ITSELF A POSITIVE
FORCE IN THE OAS AND IS CONSIDERED AN OAS LEADER.
IN CONTRAST, COSTA RICA'S ROLE IN SELA SO FAR IS
UNENTHUSIASTIC MEMBERSHIP, BUT THIS OPTION WILL BE
KEPT OPEN. THERE IS SIMILAR CONTRAST BETWEEN
COSTA RICA'S ROLE IN THE UN, WHERE IT OFTEN DEFIES THE
THIRD WORLD TO VOTE ITS CONSCIENCE ON EAST/WEST
POLITICAL MATTERS, AND UNCTAD, WHERE THE COSTA RICANS
DO NOT WISH TO BE OUT OF STEP ON NORTH/SOUTH ECONOMIC
ISSUES. (NEITHER IS COSTA RICA OUT OF STEP WITH THE
THIRD WORLD ON NORTH/SOUTH ECONOMIC ISSUES IN THE UN.)

A POLICY OF CONSTRUCTIVE BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. COMPLEMENTS COSTA RICA'S PRAGMATIC BENT IN ITS DEALINGS WITH THE U.S. IN COLLECTIVE FORA.

H. INFLUENCE OF CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S. IN COSTA RICA'S VOTING POSITION IN THE UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA: CHANGING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S. DO NOT SEEM THUS FAR TO HAVE INFLUENCED THE COSTA RICANS IN THE UN AND OTHER FORA. COSTA RICA HAS RECENTLY VOTED WITH THE U.S. IN THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL ON A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT AND SENSITIVE THIRD WORLD ISSUES (POLITICAL, NOT ECONOMIC: PUERTO RICO VCU KOREA, ZIONIST RESOLUTION) NOT BECAUSE OF THE U.S. LEAD OR ITS PERCEPTION OF THE U.S. AS A WORLD POWER BUT, PRIMARILY, BECAUSE OF THE MERITS OF THE ISSUES. THE SAME IS GENERALLY TRUE OF OTHER FORA.

TO THE EXTENT THAT THE U.S. IS INCREASINGLY PERCEIVED AS REWARDING ITS FRIENDS AND PUNISHING ITS ENEMIES, COSTA RICA WOULD EXPECT MORE FAVORABLE U.S. RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC COSTA RICAN PROBLEMS (MEAT QUOTAS, TEXTILE

VOLUNTARY RESTRAINT LEVELS, TRADE, DEVELOPMENT) IN RECOGNITION OF COSTA RICAN POSTURE ON THE BROAD RANGE OF EAST/WEST POLITICAL ISSUES. ON NORTH/SOUTH ISSUES, HOWEVER, COSTA RICA

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WILL CONTINUE TO COME DOWN MORE ON THE SIDE OF THE UNDERDEVELOPED WORLD.

I. COSTA RICA TURNING TO ANOTHER NATION TO REPLACE U.S. SUPPORT AND CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH A MOVE FOR THE U.S.: COSTA RICA HAS NO POLICY OF "TURNING TO ANOTHER NATION" TO REPLACE U.S. POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC SUPPORT. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT COSTA RICA IS NOT EXPANDING CONTACTS, ESPECIALLY ECONOMIC, WITH EUROPE, JAPAN, AND VENEZUELA, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT, THE U.S.S.R., AND EASTERN EUROPE. VENEZUELA DOES APPEAR TO BE STRIVING FOR GREATER INFLUENCE HERE. LONGTIME FRIENDSHIPS BETWEEN THE CURRENT LEADERS OF BOTH COUNTRIES (CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ LIVED HERE IN EXILE), THE COMPATIBILITY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES, THE IDEOLOGIES OF THE PARTIES IN POWER--BOTH SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC--AND VENEZUELAN MONEY ARE IMPORTANT FACTORS. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT PERCEIVE THE VENEZUELAN AS BUILDING INFLUENCE IN ANY ATTEMPT TO "REPLACE U.S. SUPPORT" (U.S. DIRECT SUPPORT IS ALREADY MINIMAL HERE), BUT GROWING VENEZUELAN INFLUENCE COULD HAVE SOME NEGATIVE EFFECTS. VENEZUELA'S EXAMPLE

OF STRIDENT STATISM IN ITS RECENT NATIONALIZATIONS AND ITS PAST SUCCESS IN OBTAINING COSTA RICAN SUPPORT FOR HIGH PETROLEUM PRICES ARE INDICATIONS OF SUCH INFLUENCE. (COSTA RICA IN 1975 BEGAN TO HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PRICE OF VENEZUELAN OIL.) ALSO, VENEZUELA AND MEXICO DO EXERT PRESSURE HERE IN AN ATTEMPT TO MOVE COSTA RICA TOWARD THIRD WORLD POSITIONS, SOME OF WHICH HAVE AN UNDENIABLE APPEAL IN A COUNTRY THAT IS, AFTER ALL, ONE OF THE POOR.

J. COSTA RICAN VIEW OF WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY OF U.S. TO MEET NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF DEVELOPING NATIONS: COSTA RICAN LEADERS AND THOSE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENT MATTERS ARE WAITING TO SEE THE RESULTS OF THE SECRETARY'S SEPTEMBER UN SPECIAL SESSION ADDRESS. THE MEASURES PROPOSED THEREIN ARE CONSIDERED SIGNIFICANT AND FAR REACHING HERE. AT THE SAME TIME, COSTA RICANS IN GENERAL PERCEIVE A DIMINISHING U.S. COMMITMENT TO MEET NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD--NOT DUE TO U.S. ABILITY BUT TO U.S. WILLINGNESS, AND AS
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EVIDENCED BY INCREASINGLY SMALL, BILATERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS. HOWEVER, A DECREASING U.S. BILATERAL ROLE IN AID IS NOT NECESSARILY VIEWED AS BAD IN THE GOCR AND AMONG DECISION-MAKERS IN THIS SOCIETY; IN FACT THE SHIFT TO MULTILATERALLY CHanneled ASSISTANCE IS CONSIDERED HEALTHY; PROVIDED SOME BILATERAL ASSISTANCE CAN BE OBTAINED WHEN NEEDED FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES.
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